

Child Abuse/Neglect: Protecting the Children in Your Care



Most child care providers are natural advocates for children. But there are times when speaking up for kids can be hard or uncomfortable. Often those are times when children need your support most, like when you suspect child abuse or neglect in a family you know.

Your courage to act on a child's behalf could be the start of positive changes for both that child and their family.

Knowledge is the first step...

What is Child Abuse? Indiana Law says:

- "The child's physical or mental health condition is seriously impaired or ...endangered as a result of the inability, refusal or neglect of the parent/guardian/custodian to supply the child with necessary food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education or supervision; **or**
- The child's physical or mental health is seriously endangered due to injury, by the act **or** omission of the parent/guardian/custodian...; **or**
- The child is a victim of a sex offense...; allowed to participate in an obscene performance; or...to commit a sex offense..."

Indiana recognizes 4 types of child maltreatment:

1. **Neglect** is failure to provide basic physical, medical, educational or emotional needs.
2. **Physical Abuse** is any non-accidental injury caused or allowed, even if harm was not intended.
3. **Sexual Abuse** is any sexual activity, direct or indirect, by an adult or older child, or allowing another person to do so, with anyone under 18 years old.
4. **Emotional Abuse** is a pattern of interaction that harms emotional development or self-worth, usually along with other forms of maltreatment.

Attention is the next...

How can I tell that a child is in danger at home?

There is no sure way, aside from seeing abuse happen. Child abuse/neglect can be part of *any* family, in any culture, career or income group, even when everyone seems happy. Sometimes, "gut" feelings are our best guide, especially if they are shared by co-workers who also know the child and/or family well. Although any type of abuse or neglect may occur alone, often several types happen in one home. *Possible* warning signs, among others, can be:



Children who...

- have many injuries, or ones that aren't well explained;
- ...are very tired, very sad or just "not there";
- ...often fight with classmates/act out abuse, destroy things, or are violent to animals;
- ...talk in detail about sexual matters;
- ...seem afraid of a parent/guardian/custodian or other adult, like a teacher or baby-sitter;
- ...spend a lot of time anywhere but home/don't want to go home, as if avoiding something there.

Children's parents who...

- ...are under lots of on-going stress and have very limited support or coping skills;
- ...stay away from other families or groups and don't take part in kids' activities;
- ...have drinking or drug abuse problems;
- ...don't want to talk about or treat their child's injuries, or are nervous or angry when they do;
- ...say they were abused as children, or are now in a violent relationship.

One sign or incident does not always mean that child abuse or neglect is going on, but it can. If you have doubts, call your county Child Protection Service with questions. Keep in mind that many troubled parents feel trapped in the cycle of abuse, and actually are relieved after a report is made, because they are no longer alone in dealing with a terrible secret.

When action is needed...

Who must report? By state law, **ANY** person who has reason to believe that a child is a victim of abuse or neglect, must make a report to child welfare or law enforcement services. *Remember, you do not need to **prove** child abuse/neglect, only have some good reasons to **suspect** abuse and/or neglect.* To report call: **IN State Child Abuse Hotline: 800-800-5556.**

Can I get in trouble for a report, if I'm wrong?

NO! Any person who reports, or is part of any investigation of a child abuse or neglect report, is immune from criminal or civil penalty, unless they acted in bad faith. However, such penalties *are* possible for *not* reporting suspected abuse/neglect.

Resources:

Prevent Child Abuse Indiana: 800-244-5373 or www.pcain.org

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse & Neglect Info: 800-394-3366 or www.calib.com/nccanch

Child Help USA: 800-422-4453 or www.childhelpusa.org

Information consistent with *Caring for Our Children, 2002:*
www.nrc.uchsc.edu